



Small Arms, Big Harms

A Call to Action by Civil Society on Gender and Small Arms Control

We as civil society groups from all parts of the world, work for peace and security, mutual understanding, and sustainable development at the grassroots level and therefore in the service of all of humanity;

We acknowledge the diverse roles women and men play in societies, including in peace and in conflict settings;

We highlight that men constitute a great majority of the owners of small arms. The vast majority of perpetrators and victims are also young men;

We note that men dominate professions and activities with easy access to arms and domains of decision-making on security at the international, national, and local levels: politics, diplomacy, law enforcement, military, municipal councils, and committees of elders;

We underline that for women, small arms and intimate-partner violence are a fatal combination. Globally, over one third of murders of women are committed by a male intimate partner, often with small arms. In areas of conflict, sexual violence perpetrated by armed intimidation is an unending scourge. In both conflict and crime settings women bear a heavy burden – psychological and economic – when male family members are injured or killed.

We acknowledge and respect the experience of interconnectedness by women across communities and borders and the solidarity they often feel even with those across conflict lines.

We urge a thorough inclusion of gender perspectives in small arms control policies, programmes and activities in all settings and at all levels, including addressing the gendered nature of ownership and use of small arms, the differentiated effects of small arms on women and men, and the ways in which gender roles can shape small arms policies and practices.

Considerable advances have been made in the international policy framework regarding the convergence of the small arms control agenda and the Women, Peace and Security agenda.¹ For example, during the Third Review Conference on the UN Programme of Action (PoA), States reiterated the importance of encouraging “the full participation and representation of women, including in leadership roles and as agents of change, in policymaking, planning and implementation processes [...] relating to community safety, violence reduction, collection and destruction of small arms and light weapons and conflict prevention and resolution.” States also recognised “that eradicating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons is a key part of combating gender-based violence.

We call on States, international, regional and sub-regional organisations, civil society, and all relevant stakeholders to strengthen the linkage of these two agendas in future PoA meetings and to operationalize the gender-related outcomes of the Third Review Conference.

¹ See, e.g., UN Office for Disarmament Affairs Gender Mainstreaming Action Plan (2016); UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000); UN Arms Trade Treaty (2013); and meeting outcomes under the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (2001).

Engaging all stakeholders to advance gender perspectives in small arms control

Small arms are the only weapons category owned mostly by civilians. Proper regulation of these weapons requires measures and capacity-building well beyond those involved in government control of other weapons systems: for instance, engaging with municipal government, police, grassroots civil society groups, at-risk youth, and community violence reduction initiatives. Engagement must be inclusive and target all demographics, including women and girls. The promise made by States during the Third Review Conference to ensure coordination between “national authorities responsible for the implementation of the Programme of Action” and “national authorities responsible for women’s affairs or gender equality, as well as women’s civil society groups” is a first step toward introducing a gendered perspective in discussions about small arms.

Another major commitment at the Third Review Conference was for States to collect data that can illuminate the gender-specific impacts of the illicit arms trade. Data disaggregated by gender can help to highlight the importance of regulating small arms to combat gender-based violence. However, the data will need to be disaggregated not only by sex but also by age for a more complete understanding of the harms caused by illicit trade in arms.

Addressing gender stereotypes

When the gender dimension is not sufficiently identified through accurate, detailed, and evidence-based information, and consequently not adequately addressed in legislative and policy frameworks on small arms, the success of interventions is diminished, thereby gravely undermining the effectiveness of small arms control.

A gender lens can explain the persistence of socially constructed gender stereotypes, linking small arms ownership, use, and misuse to specific expressions of masculinity related to control, power, domination and strength.²

Meaningful representation and participation of women

Gender imbalance in decision-making bodies influences the policy discourse on small arms. The recognition and participation of women as key stakeholders and experts in policy processes related to small arms control, both at the international and national levels, would lead to the adoption of perspectives and outcomes that more accurately reflect the highly-gendered dynamics and effects of small arms. The Women, Peace and Security framework, including UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), remains a vital mechanism for promoting equal and meaningful representation of women at all levels of engagement on peace and security issues.

A call to action

Hence, we call upon States, UN agencies, international, regional and sub-regional organisations and civil society to:

- Follow through on the agreements made during the Third Review Conference to incorporate gender perspectives into the UN small arms process by encouraging the “full participation and representation of women” in national reporting on the PoA and all aspects of the implementation of the instrument.

² See, e.g. UN Modular Small-Arms Control Implementation Compendium (MOSAIC) 06.10: Women, men and the gendered nature of small arms and light weapons (October 2017), 17.

- Make use of the Modular Small Arms Control Implementation Compendium (MOSAIC) 6.10 on “Women, men and the gendered nature of small arms and light weapons” to gender-mainstream activities related to implementation of the PoA³;
- Challenge predominant gender stereotypes that associate masculinity with the ownership and use of small arms, which increases the risk of gender-based violence. This effort can be aided by challenging the connections between violence and masculinity and educating around gender norms, as well as through peace education that promotes tolerance, forgiveness, gender equality, nonviolent conflict resolution, and alternative expressions of non-violent masculinity;
- Fund and give priority to the meaningful participation of women and girls in discussions and solutions relating to small arms control at local, national, regional, and international levels, and in formal disarmament initiatives as part of peace processes and negotiations;
- Support and fund initiatives to further build and strengthen the capacity and skills of women, to enable their meaningful participation in the UN small arms process. This includes documenting women’s experience in decision-making and political processes in relation to small arms control, and improving women’s awareness of and access to such opportunities pursuant to the provisions in UNSCR 1325;
- Allocate and mobilise funds to enhance the work of civil society organisations, in particular women’s organisations, on small arms, women’s rights, and gender mainstreaming, including advocacy, education, training, implementation, and monitoring of national laws and policies;
- Support measures to strengthen control over civilian possession of small arms in order to reduce diversion and misuse;
- Ensure the effective implementation of the gender-based-violence provisions of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) whereby it is illegal to transfer weapons if there is a risk that the weapons will be used to facilitate gender-based violence (article 7(4)).
- Ensure that women are consulted in processes related to national weapons collection and destruction programmes; disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration, and community violence reduction programmes; and that such programmes are gender-mainstreamed by including components such as survivor assistance, psychosocial support, and livelihood programmes for women and men;
- Understand the opportunity during the transition from conflict to peace for unequal gender relations to be transformed, giving women new openings for fuller participation in political, social, and cultural affairs;
- Recognise the role women can play in encouraging men in their families, and mobilising communities through peace movements, to give up their weapons;
- Take into account that when communities are offered development aid incentives in return for giving up their weapons, women, if asked at all, have requested projects less prestigious than men, but with a more direct effect on alleviating their workload and reducing their poverty;

³ <https://s3.amazonaws.com/unoda-web/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/MOSAIC-06.10-2017EV1.0.pdf>:

- Recognise that armed groups that have recruited female fighters, sometimes by force, may not give females their own arms or may prevent them from keeping arms after peace accords are signed, resulting in many female ex-combatants and other women associated with fighting forces not being included in disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration programmes⁴;
- Recognise that reintegration programmes for female ex-combatants, in particular those who previously held leadership positions, should take into account their former status and role of command, rather than offer traditional reintegration programmes for women in a domesticated context;
- Promote and produce quality, participatory research and analysis highlighting the gendered effects of armed violence and its links with poverty and other forms of social injustice; and
- Stipulate that more detailed sex- and age-differentiated data on small arms ownership and use should be collected through relevant national bodies, such as statistical offices, including for use in national reporting on the Programme of Action and for use in strengthening and improving small arms control programmes and initiatives – and that gender-expert involvement is needed in examining this data.
- Promote gender equality in interactions with other States, and prioritise gender equality in all aspects of international interaction – including but not limited to: aid, trade, defence, development, and security.

We call on States to help strengthen our collective efforts to address this urgent problem by consistently applying gendered approaches to small arms control.

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Regulate weaponry – develop community



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⁴ Farr, V., H. Myrtilinen and A. Schnabel, *Sexed Pistols: The Gendered Impacts of Small Arms and Light Weapons* (United Nations University Press 2009), 424-428.